LXXIV
FINANCE

I

So much that is erroneous regarding Irving's financial matters has been said at any time from the beginning of his success on to the day of his death—and after—that I think it well to speak frankly of the matter now. Indeed there is no reason that I know of why it should not be made public. During his lifetime, ever since his business affairs were conducted on a big scale, we observed for purely protective reasons a very strict reticence. It must be remembered that a theatre, and especially a popular one, is a centre of great curiosity. Every one wants to know all about it, and curiosity-mongers if they cannot discover facts invent them. The only possible safeguard that I know of is strict reticence at headquarters, and the formulation of such a system of accounts as makes it impossible for lesser officials to know any more than their own branch of work entails. To this end all our books at the Lyceum were designed and kept. Not one official of the theatre outside myself knew the whole of the incomings and the outgoings. Some knew part of one, some knew part of the other; not even that official who was designated "treasurer" knew anything of the high finance of the undertaking. The box-office keeper made entry of daily receipts and checked over the nightly booking-sheet so as to secure accuracy in his own work; but he had no knowledge whatever of the cash receipts at pit or gallery, where all is ready money. The treasurer made to the bank such lodgments as I gave him; he paid treasury to the actors and staff on each Friday according to the list which I gave him, and on every Tuesday he paid such accounts as were settled in cash and such of my own cheques as I gave to his keeping for the purpose to be paid according to my list. But he did not pay all the salaries—did not know them. Certain of them I myself paid, and these were not of the smaller amounts. He did not pay all the trade accounts; not the larger of them in any case. The weekly accounts of the heads of departments-carpenters, 428property, wardrobe, gas, electric, supers, chorus, orchestra, &c.—having been thoroughly checked in the office and vouched for by the stage manager, were paid in bulk to the heads of the departments, who distributed the amounts, and returned to me the receipted accounts with vouchers. In fact, the minor books kept by the various departments of both receipts and expenditure had practically only one side. Such officials either received money for handing in to me or paid out money given to them for the purpose. None of them did both. Thus it was that we kept our business to ourselves. Even in such a matter as free admissions none except those in the "office" knew of them. They did not go through the box-office at all, but were sent out under my own instruction in each individual case. Even the "bill orders"—the equivalent

given in kind to those small traders who exhibit in their windows bills of the play of "double crown" or "folio" size—were not distributed in the usual way through the "bill inspector," but sent out in properly directed envelopes by the clerical staff. The account-books of the theatre were kept by myself and rigidly preserved in a great safe of which I alone had the key. The safe stood in the room which Irving and I and Loveday used in common, so that the books were always available for Irving's purposes when he required them. The accounts were very carefully audited by chartered accountants whose clerks made monthly check of details. Then at the end of each season the audit was completed by the accountants themselves, who made return to Irving direct in sealed envelopes.

Thus I can say that all through Irving's management from the time of my joining him in 1878 till the time of my handing over such matters as were in my care to the executors—by their own desire, after his will had been found, and before his funeral—no one, except Irving himself, myself, and the chartered accountants (who made audit and whose profession is one sworn to individual secrecy) knew Irving's affairs. I am thus particular because the very reticence which we adopted as a policy and pursued as a system was a wise protection, with of course such attendant possibilities as belong to a custom of strict reticence. Not once, in all our long connection of friendship and business, have I given to any one without Irving's special permission a single detail of his business. It was not until 1904, when I was writing an article by request of the Editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, *apropos* of his return to Sunderland after an absence of nearly fifty years, that we 429made known even approximately the vast total of his takings during his management. I quoted figures in that article—which in modern form the paper designated as "an appreciation"—with Irving's consent, and ran up to London from Derby, where we were then playing, to verify them. When we were arranging the matter I reminded him that I had never in all the years given a figure unless he had asked me to. Whereupon he said:

"But you are always free to use what figures and anything else of mine you will. You know, my dear fellow, what confidence I have in your discretion. You are quite free in the matter, now and always!"

With this permission I feel at ease in now dealing publicly with matters regarding which I have been silent for so many years. I deal with them now because I regard them as good for Irving—for that memory which he valued more than life.

When Irving took over the Lyceum from Mrs. Bateman he had then accumulated no fortune. He received only a salary up to the time of Colonel Bateman's death. He then had salary—an extraordinarily mild one considering all things—and a prospective

share of profits, which under the circumstances did not amount to much. Practically such little as he had in the autumn of 1878 was rather in the nature of a treasury balance than of capital. Of course, in his tour he was earning good money, and this came in a "ready" form; but the expenses which he was incurring in the reorganising and beautifying the Lyceum were vastly in excess of his present earning. When I came to London and took over his financial matters his bankers, the London and County Bank, had already arranged with him a large overdraft, some £12,000, for which he had given bills. This debt and all others incurred in preparation of his long campaign at the Lyceum were duly paid. Throughout his whole managerial life his payment was twenty shillings in the pound, with added interest whenever such was due or possible.

When he was undertaking the provincial tour in the autumn of 1878—the first under his own management, his friend, Mrs. Hannah Brown, the life-long friend and companion of the Baroness Burdett-Coutts, pressed on him a loan of fifteen hundred pounds. She had wished him to accept a larger sum, but he limited the amount to this. Indeed he took it at all to please her; such a sum went but a small way in the vast enterprise on which he had entered. Unhappily she died before he began to play in his own theatre. The sum which she had lent was repaid to her executor in due season.

430When he first knew her, Mrs. Brown was a very old lady. She had been immensely struck with his power, and had recognised before most others the probable destiny that lay before him. When she was almost if not entirely blind he used to often go to see her and the Baroness, in the house in Stratton Street or elsewhere as they resided. Of course, all this I only know from being told it, for Mrs. Brown had died just before I came to live in London. Lady Burdett-Coutts told me of the great affection which Mrs. Brown had for the clever man whose genius she so much admired, and whose friendship was such a delight in her old age. Not long after Irving's death, when I was dining with her and Mr. Burdett-Coutts, she said:

"I don't think he ever passed the house in her later years without coming in to see her, if only for a moment!" Others, too, of the old friends have spoken to me of Mrs. Brown without stint; and of her Irving often spoke to me himself. She used to go to the Lyceum time after time. During the long run of *Hamlet* she went some thirty times. For her pleasure the Baroness rented from the management a box at the Lyceum. This was not in itself unique, for she had already a box at Drury Lane Theatre and another at Her Majesty's Opera House. I was told that when the old lady was dying—she was then I believe about or over eighty—she spoke of Irving and his future, mentioning him as: "My poor brave boy!" Irving was then forty, but he was still a "boy" to a woman of her great age.

Mrs. Brown had very considerable means of her own, and a bequest paid by her executor to Irving was five thousand pounds. This was handed to him at the final settlement of her affairs in, strange to say, bank-notes. That evening he told me of it when he arrived at the theatre. When he did so I opened the door of the safe thinking that he intended to place it there in safety until the next morning, when it could be lodged in bank. I was mightily surprised when he told me that he had not got it with him. He smiled at me as he said:

“I was afraid to carry it with me. I never in my life had so much money close to me!”

“What have you done with it?” I asked.

“I left it in my room at home!”

“Is it put by safely?” I asked again.

“Oh yes!” he added quickly, as though justifying himself. I had an idea that it was *not* quite safe and went on with my queries:

431“Where is it?” He smiled, I thought superiorly, as he answered:

“In my hat-box!”

“You locked it, I hope?” Again the smile:

“What would be the use of that? If I had locked away anything it would only have called attention to it. The hat-box is simply lying there as usual with the lid half off. No one would dream of suspecting it—not in a thousand years!”

This illustrates, I think, in a remarkable way the subtlety of his own character, and the method by which he judged others. He had passed the possibilities “through his mind,” and was so content with his knowledge that he backed it with a fortune. Later on there was a boy who *did* take things from his rooms. He was, however, found out and the property recovered, all except Edwin Forrest’s watch of which a part had been probably melted down.

That legacy of five thousand pounds was, so far as I know, and had there been other I should certainly have known, the only money which Irving received for which he did not work, through all the long course of his years of much toil. I mention it now specifically because one of the unkindly, presuming that his ignorance of fact was the ignorance of others also, made after the actor’s death a statement that he had been “subsidised.” It ought not to be necessary to contradict such reckless statements—they ought never to have been made; but having been made it is best to let the exact

facts be known. The best of all bucklers, for the living or the dead, is simple, honest truth.

The needs of the theatre were very great; at the beginning almost overwhelming. On my first taking over the responsibility of business affairs I acquired a wide experience of what is known as “pulling the devil by the tail.” When Irving took the Lyceum its entire holding capacity was £228. Sometimes under extraordinary pressure, when every inch of standing room was occupied, we got in a little more; but only once in the first two seasons did we cover £250. That was on Irving’s “Benefit,” as it was then called.

The autumn of 1881 was devoted to enlarging and improving the house. At a cost of over £12,000 it was made to hold another £100. Thence on, various improvements and certain dispositions of the seating were effected, which brought up the holding power to a maximum of about £420, though on very special occasions we managed to squeeze in a little more. Some idea may be formed 432of the vast expense of working such a theatre as the Lyceum, and in the way which Irving worked it, when I say that on that theatre he spent in what we called “Expenses on the House” a sum of £60,000. During my time the “Production account” amounted to nearly £200,000.

The takings for his own playing between the time of beginning management, 30th December 1878, and the day of his death, 13th October 1905, amounted to the amazing total of over two million pounds sterling.

II

Only those who have experience of the working of a great theatre can have any idea of the vast expenditure necessary to hold success. A play may be a success or a failure, and its life must have a natural termination; but a theatre has to go on at almost equal pressure and expense through bad times and good alike. It is necessary for the management to have a large reserve of strength ready to be used if need arises. This implies ceaseless expenditure; a portion of which never can be repaid because the plays which involve it have to be abandoned. It is really too much work for one man to have to think of the policy of the future, and of carrying it into effect, whilst at the same time he has to work as an artist in the running play. No monetary reward would atone for such labour; only ambition can give the spur. Things, therefore, are so constituted in the theatrical world that the ambitious artist *must* be his own manager. And only those strong enough to be both artist and man of business can win through. The strain of ceaseless debt must always be the portion of any one who endeavours to uphold serious drama in a country where subsidy is not a custom. In the future, the State or the Municipality may find it a duty to support such effort, on the ground of

public good. Otherwise the artist must pay with shortened life the price of his high endeavour. Light performances may and generally do succeed, but good plays seriously undertaken must always be at great risk to the venturer. For more than twenty-five years Irving did for England that which in other nations is furthered by the State; and his theatre was known and respected all over the world. This entailed not only hospitality in all forms to foreign artists, but to many, many strangers attracted by the fame of his undertaking, and anxious to meet so famous a man in person. This duty Irving never shirked; he had ever a 433ready hand for any stranger, and in the long career of his ministration of the duties of hospitality he actually aided, so far as one man could do, the popularity of his own country amongst the nations of the world. Such men are the true Ambassadors of Peace, as well as National benefactors. Reputation for hospitality and charity is a factor in the enlargement of the demands made on these. When duty called, Irving was never found wanting, in this or any other form.

But still through all it must be remembered that the more he had to spend the harder he had to work to earn the wherewithal to do it. When I came to him first, six performances each week in heavy plays was deemed sufficient work for the strongest; but as time went on a *matinée* was added. And for some twenty years seven performances a week was the working rule. In light, amusing, or unemotional plays this is not too much; for when a run is on, the ordinary work of rehearsal is suspended. But for heavy plays it is too much. Still what is one to do who is playing for the big stakes of life? Brain and body, nerve and soul have to be ground up in the effort to hold the place already won. Irving was determined from the very first to strain every nerve for the honour of his art; for the perfecting of stage work; for his own fame. To these ends he gave himself, his work, his fortune. He forwent very many of the ordinary pleasures of life, and laboured unceasingly and without swerving from his undertaken course. He gave freely in its cause all the fortune that came to him as quickly as it accrued. It was only when through shocks of misfortune and the stress of coming age he was unable to put by the large sums necessary for further developments that he had to forestall the future temporarily. Bankers are of necessity stern folk and unless one can give *quid pro quo* in some shape they are pretty obdurate as to advances. Therefore it was that now and again, despite the enormous sums that he earned, he had occasionally to get an advance. Fortunately, there were friends who were proud and happy to aid him. Such never lost by their kindness; every advance was punctiliously met, and the attachment between him and such friends grew ever and ripened. It would be invidious to mention who those friends were. Some perhaps would not like their names mentioned, and so “the rest is silence.”

There were not many occasions when such measures were necessary. I only mention them now lest any of those friends should deem me wanting, in even such a partial record as this, did I not 434mention that Henry Irving had constant and loving friends who held any power in their hands at his disposal, and were alike glad and proud to help him in the splendid work which he was doing. Let me, as the only mouthpiece that he now can ever have, since I alone know all those friends, say that to the last hour of his life he was grateful to them for their sympathy, and belief, and timely help; and for all the self-confidence which their trust gave to him.

III

When after his long illness in 1898–1899 the proposition of selling his interest in the Lyceum was made to Irving by the Lyceum Theatre Company—the parent Company—the terms suggested were these:

He was to convey to the Company his lease—of which some eighteen years were still to run, and all his furniture and fittings in the theatre. He was for five years—the duration of the contract—to play an annual engagement of at least a hundred performances at the Lyceum on terms which were mentioned and which were between 10 per cent. and 25 per cent. less than he was in the habit of receiving in any other theatre. He was to hand over to the Company one-fourth of all his profits made by acting elsewhere, he guaranteeing to play on tour at least four months in each year. He was to give the Company free use of such of his scenery and properties as were not in his own use. He was to pay all the expenses of production of plays in the first year, and in the others 60 per cent. of the same. For the first season he was to guarantee the Company a minimum of £100 for their share of each performance. He was to pay all the stage expenses, and half of the advertisements.

For this the Company were to pay him down £26,500 in cash and £12,500 in fully paid shares in proportion of the two classes, viz., £100,000 6 per cent. preference shares and £70,000 ordinary shares.

I protested to Irving against the terms. I had already worked out the figures of results, according to such data as were available, of this scheme and also of an alternative one, in case he wished to abandon or alter the one on which we had already decided. The difference was that according to the alternative scheme, he would at the end of five years, in addition to the total of profits realisable by the Company scheme, be still in possession of his theatre, scenery, and property of all kinds.

435That I was correct has been shown by the unhappy result of the Company enterprise. The Company lost almost persistently except in the seasons when Irving

played. The one exception was, I believe, when William Gillette played *Sherlock Holmes*, a piece which Irving recommended the directors to accept. I was present at its first night in New York, and saw at once its London possibilities.

The Company lasted from the beginning of 1899 till the end of the season of 1902. During this period of less than four years the total amount in cash accruing to the Company from Irving's acting was roughly £29,000.

In estimating this amount I took as the basis of the Company's expenses the cost of running the theatre in our own time for the number of weeks covering the time of Irving's seasons with the Company. This allowed as liberal an amount as our own management, which was carried out on a much more generous scale. I excluded only the item of rental, which, as the Company was its own landlord, would be represented by the productiveness of the capital. The above amount would, roughly, have paid during each of the whole four years in which the contract lasted the preference shareholders their whole 6 per cent. and the ordinary shareholders over 1½ per cent. in each entire year, leaving seven whole months of each year, exclusive of summer holidays, for earning the 4 per cent. dividend on the £120,000 mortgage debentures, and increasing the dividend on the ordinary shares.

It will from the above figures be seen that the contract which Irving made with the Lyceum Company was not in any way a beneficial one for him, but an excellent one for them.

I am particular about giving these figures in detail, for at some of the meetings of the Company there was the usual angry "heckling" of the directorate regarding losses; and there were not lacking those who alleged that Irving was in some way to blame for the result. But I am bound to say that when, at the meeting in 1903, I thought it necessary to put a stop to such misconception and gave the rough figures showing the results of his playing during the time the contract existed, my statement was received even by the disappointed shareholders with loud and continuous cheers—the only cheers which I ever heard at a meeting of the Company. I honestly believe that there was not one person in the room who was not genuinely and heartily glad to be reassured from such an authoritative source as myself as to Irving's position with the Company.

436The cancellation of the contract between Irving and the Lyceum Theatre Company was in no way due to any fault or default of his. It became necessary solely because the Company was unable to fulfil its part. The London County Council, in accordance with some new regulations, called on the Company to make certain structural alterations in the theatre. The directors said they could not afford to make them as

their funds were exhausted; and so the theatre had to remain closed. At that time Irving had already undertaken vast responsibilities with regard to the play of *Dante*, for which he had made contracts with painters and costumiers, and had engaged artists. It was vitally necessary that he should have a theatre wherein to play; and so there was no alternative but to annul the contract. Even as it was, he had to take on his own shoulders the whole of the vast cost of the production upon which he had entered as a joint concern.

In fine, Irving's dealings with the Company may be thus summed up. He received in all for his property, lease, goodwill, fixtures, furniture, the use of his stock of scenery and properties, and a fourth of his profits elsewhere, £39,000 paid as follows: cash, £26,500; shares, £12,500. He repaid by his work £29,000 in cash. The shares he received proved valueless.[6] He gave, in fact, his property and £2500 for nothing;—and he lost about two years of his working life.

6. The preference shares at the break-up sold for, as well as I remember, *seven pence* for each fully paid share of one pound sterling. He would never sell his shares lest his doing so might injure the property of the Company. They were only parted with at the winding-up, when the Receiver sold, on his own authority, all unapplied-for shares.

I should like to say, on my own account, and for my own protection, inasmuch as I was Sir Henry Irving's business manager, that from first to last I had absolutely no act or part in the formation of the Lyceum Theatre Company—in its promotion, flotation, or working. Even my knowledge of it was confined to matters touched on in the contract with Irving. From the first I had no information as to its purposes, scope or methods, outside the above. I did not take a single share till it began to look queer with regard to its future; I then bought from a friend five shares for which I paid par value. This I did in order that I might have a right to attend the meetings. Later, in 1903, when shares were selling at all sorts of prices I bought some in the open market. This was simply as a speculation, as I regarded the freehold of the Lyceum as a valuable property which might eventually realise a price which 437would make my investment at the prevailing figures a good one. These shares I protected on the winding-up and reconstruction of the Company with an assessment of 25 per cent. of their face value. But finally, seeing the conditions under which the new Company was about to work, I sold them in the usual way through my broker.

As a matter of fact I was on the Atlantic or in America at the time the parent company or syndicate—to whom it was that Irving had sold his property—was formed. When I arrived home this association had become merged in the Lyceum Theatre Company

which had been floated, and of which the whole capital had been subscribed. Not for nearly a year afterwards did I even see a copy of the prospectus of the Company.

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LXXV
THE TURN OF THE TIDE

I

“There is a tide in the affairs of men.” For twenty-five years it flowed for Henry Irving without let or lull. From the production of *The Bells* in November 1871 he became famous; and thence on he bore himself so well that with the exception of the disgruntled few who grudge success to any one, he was accorded by all an unquestioned supremacy in his chosen art. For a full quarter of a century there was nothing but ever-increasing esteem and honour and position; an undeviating prosperity which made all things possible to the ambitious actor. True, the success was accompanied throughout by endless labour and self-sacrifice, and by grinding responsibility. His life was more strenuous than the lives of most successful men. For an actor’s work is altogether personal, and when in addition to the practice of his art he undertakes the added stress and risk of management such, too, is altogether personal. But, after all, labour and responsibility are the noblest roads by which a man may travel towards honour. By any other way success is merely the outcome of hazard.

But the tide must turn some time—otherwise the force would be not a tide but a current. The turning came on the night of 19th December 1896—the night of his production of *Richard III.* A night of unqualified success—as should be when high-water mark is reached. A night which seemed to crown the personal triumph of the years. After the performance and when the cheering crowd had taken their reluctant way, Irving had a large gathering on the stage. Such had become a custom on first and last nights of the season, and now and again on marked occasions. They were very delightful opportunities for large and comprehensive hospitality, enjoyed, I think, by all. So soon as the curtain fell the scenery would be put rapidly into the “scene docks” and the stage left clear. Then the caterers, who had everything ready, would place long tables round three sides of the stage and prepare a cold 439“standing” supper for all who were expected. During this time Irving would have rapidly changed his costume for evening dress; so that by the time the waiting guests in the auditorium were beginning to file in on the stage through the iron door in the proscenium O.P., he would meet them coming from his dressing-room. I used to stand at the door myself so as to see that no chance guests whose presence was welcome were denied. For very often

there were in the house some whom Irving would like to welcome, and of whose presence we were ignorant to the last. The whole proceeding was an informal one. There were no invitations except such verbal ones as I conveyed myself. On such occasions there would be from three to six hundred guests on the stage, a large proportion of whom were persons whose names were at least widely known; representatives of art and letters, of statesmanship and the various forms of public life; of the great social world, of the professions, of commerce—of the whole great world of personal endeavour.

On this particular occasion there was a large gathering. When the curtain went up on the empty proscenium, the big stage seemed a solid mass of men and women. One could tell Irving’s whereabouts by the press of friends thronging round to congratulate him on the renewal of his success in *Richard III.* of twenty years before.

Little by little as time wore away the crowd thinned. When the last had gone Irving and a very dear friend of his, Professor (afterwards Sir James) Dewar, went for a while to the Garrick Club. After the strain of such a night sleep was shy and the kindest thing that any friend could do was to keep with him and talk over matters old and new, so as to make a break between strain and rest. That night was a strangely exciting one to Irving. On it he had reproduced after a lapse of just twenty years one of the greatest and most surprising successes of his earlier life. For *Richard III.* when he played it in 1877 was a new thing to all who saw it. Clement Scott, writing of it in the *Daily Telegraph*, had said:

“The enjoyment derived from the performance was undoubtedly heightened by the pleasurable astonishment with which the playgoer made the unexpected discovery of a new source of dramatic delight. It is not often that a frequenter of theatres can recall in the course of a long experience one particular night when the channels of thought seemed to be flushed by a tide of new sensations.”

440On the night of its revival all the old triumph came back afresh. No wonder that the player was too high-strung to rest. From the Garrick the two friends walked to Albemarle Street where Dewar had his rooms in the Royal Institution. There they sat and smoked for a while and discussed the philosophy of Acting and the form of education which would be most beneficial for Irving’s sons. When Irving rose to go home—he lived literally “round the corner” in 15A Grafton Street, Dewar went with him. Irving insisted on his going in for a few minutes. This he acceded to, anxious that the super-wearied man should not feel lonely at such a time. After a cigar Dewar left. It was then coming daylight, and Irving announced his intention of taking a bath before turning in. Dewar left him tranquil and now ready for his needed rest.

The stairs in the Grafton Street "upper part" were steep and narrow, and Irving in the dim light of morning which was stealing into the staircase slipped a foot on the top stair. Unfortunately on the narrow landing stood an old oak chest. His knee as he slipped struck this, and the blow and the strain of recovery ruptured the ligatures under the knee cap. When in the morning the surgeon who had been sent for saw him he declared that it would be utterly impossible for him to play for some time. Further advice was even more pessimistic, placing the period at months.

The disaster of that morning was the beginning of many which struck, and struck, and struck again as though to even up his long prosperity to the normal measure allotted to mankind.

It was ten weeks before he was able to play again. Ellen Terry had gone to Homburg—whither she had been recommended—the day after *Cymbeline*—which had preceded *Richard III.*—had been taken off. It was the end of January before she could give up her "cure" and return to London. She played *Olivia* for three weeks with good effect. We had tried *Cymbeline* for a week after Christmas; but with Irving and Ellen Terry out of the cast the receipts were such that though the salaries, rent and such running expenses had to be paid in any case, it was cheaper to close than go on. The entire income did not nearly pay the expenses of keeping the theatre open instead of shut.

That accident of a foot-slip cost Irving two months and a half of illness and an out-of-pocket expense of over six thousand pounds. This instead of the prosperous winter season which had already seemed assured.

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II

A little more than a year afterwards, February 1898, came the burning of the storage, which I have already described, and the effect of which was so permanently disastrous in crippling effort. Eight months after that came the greatest calamity of his life.

The disasters of these three years, 1896–7–8, seemed cumulative and consistent. The first struck his activity; the second crippled his resources; the third destroyed his health.

III

To any human being health is a boon. To an actor, *quâ* actor, it is existence. During the provincial tour in the autumn of 1898 all was going well. We had got through the earlier

weeks of the tour when we had, through very hot weather, played at some of the lesser places and were now in the big cities. Birmingham and Edinburgh had shown fine results of the week's work in each place, and we were in the midst of the first week in Glasgow—always a stronghold of Irving. On the Thursday night, 13th October, we were playing *Madame Sans-Gêne* to a fine house and all was going splendidly. Just before the curtain went up on the second act, in which Napoleon makes his appearance, Irving sent for me to my office. I came at once to his dressing-room. I found him sitting down dressed for his part. His face was drawn with pain at each breath. When I came in he said:

"I think there must be something wrong with me. Every breath is like a sword-stab. I don't think I ought to be suffering like this without seeing some one." As I saw that he was really ill, I asked if I might go and dismiss the audience. But he would not hear of it. Never in his life have I known him let any pain of his own keep him from his work. He said:

"I shall be able to get through all right; but when I have seen a doctor we may have to make some change for to-morrow." I hurried off to send for a doctor, and as his call came he went on the stage. The doctor arrived during the last act, but he could not see him till the end of the play. Then the doctor said he feared he was seriously ill, and hurried him off to his hotel—and to bed. A careful examination showed that he had both pneumonia and pleurisy. Two nurses of special excellence were picked out and preparations were made for a lengthy illness.

442The bill for next night was *The Merchant of Venice*, and Norman Forbes, almost without preparation, played Shylock. The tour went on by Irving's wish, for the livelihood of some seventy people depended on it. The ten weeks which it lasted cost him a very considerable sum of money.

The cause of his illness was a chill he received the previous Sunday. That day the Company went from Edinburgh to Glasgow, but he remained as he had an engagement to lunch at Dalmeny with Lord Rosebery. In the afternoon he drove back to Edinburgh and took train. At that time, however, the new station of the North British Railway was in process of erection and had reached a stage in which the road from Princes Street down to the level of the line was blocked during reconstruction; so that it was necessary to walk down. There had been a good deal of rain that afternoon and the torn roadway was full of water-pools. In walking through the imperfectly lighted way he got his feet wet and had to sit in this condition in a carriage without a foot-warmer during the hour's journey to Glasgow. He did not feel the ill effects immediately, but the seeds of the disease, or rather the diseases, had been laid.

Of course during his illness he had every help and care that could be. But his case was a bad one. For seven weeks he lay ill in Glasgow. During this time I almost lived in trains, seeing the work started and finished in each town and in the meantime travelling to Glasgow and to London, where immense and responsible work for the future had to be done. Forbes-Robertson had then the Lyceum for an autumn season, but his tenancy expired at Christmas. So we arranged that the Carl Rosa Opera Company should play for six weeks. Then Martin Harvey would produce a play, *The Only Way*, a version of Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, dramatised by Freeman Wills. Our negotiations for letting the theatre were very difficult, for as we did not know when it would be possible for Irving to play, we had in every case to have the option of bringing the temporary tenancy to an end at any time to suit us. This involved that every arrangement made by any one renting the theatre should contain similar conditions with other people. Nevertheless, through all difficulties we arranged for the provisional occupation of the theatre at a good rental right up to the end of July.

As I used to see Irving every few days I could note his progress—down or up. At first, of course, he got worse and worse; weaker, 443and suffering more pain. He had never in his life been anything but lean, but now as he lost flesh the outline of his features grew painfully keen. The cheeks and chin and lips, which he had kept clean-shaven all his life, came out stubbly with white hair. At that time his hair was iron-grey, but no more. I remember one early morning when I came into the sitting-room and found his faithful valet, Walter, in tears. When I asked him the cause—for I feared it was death—he said through his sobs:

"He is like Gregory Brewster!"—the old soldier in *Waterloo*. Walter did not come into the room with me; he feared he would break down and so do harm. When I stole into the room Irving had just waked. He was glad to see me, but he looked very old and weak. Poor Walter's description was sadly accurate. Indeed he realised the pathetic picture of the dying Sir John Falstaff given by Mrs. Quickly: "His nose was as sharp as a pen...."

It was not till 7th December that he was well enough to get back to London. On the 15th at Manchester, where I then was with the Company, I got a wire from him asking to see me at once on urgent business. I saw him next morning. The business was regarding a speculative offer made to him, against which I strongly advised him. The business did not, however, require much thought; it came to an end before it was well started. That day he left for Bournemouth. He was looking well when he left, though still very weak. He felt much even the going *down* stairs from his second floor in Grafton Street. For the remainder of his life he could never with ease go *up* stairs.

On Wednesday morning, 21st December, I got a wire asking me to come down to Bournemouth by the 2.15 train. I arrived at five at the Bath Hotel where he was staying. The note in my diary says:

"H. I. looking well. Much stronger, self-possessed and evenly balanced. Arranged to tour at Easter. Lyceum season in September and October. American tour in autumn."

This was just what I had already advised. We had arranged for a rack-rental of the Lyceum for the season. We should have a tour of three months with small expenses, as we should only take a few plays with light casts and would only play in places in which he had never appeared. The satisfactory result was a foregone conclusion.

Then would come a holiday of two months to recuperate and get 444strong, and then a season of eight weeks in London. This, too, promised more than well. He had already arranged with Sardou and Moreau to produce *Robespierre* that year (1899); and as he had paid a thousand pounds advance royalties he would have no fees to pay for five or six weeks. He had then also an offer of ten thousand pounds for his lease of the Lyceum to come into operation after October. This offer was still open in case he should wish to avail himself of it. The American tour promised a rich reward.

Irving's judgment was at high tide when with fresh hope and vigour he accepted this policy. I left him the next morning to join the tour at Brighton where it was to finish on Saturday, Christmas Eve. We were both in good spirits, hopeful and happy.

IV

It was an unfortunate thing for his own prosperity that Irving did not adhere to the arrangement then made. I fear that the chagrin which he felt at the check to his plans had too operative a force with him. When the offer made by the parent Lyceum Theatre Company was put before him he jumped at it; and before he had consulted with me about it, or even told me of it, he had actually signed a tentative acceptance. It was now three weeks since he had agreed as to the policy of the immediate future. Loveday and I had been during that time engaged in working out the provincial and American tours, so that it was a surprise when he sent to us both to come down to Bournemouth to see him regarding the new proposal. We went down on the 12th January and stayed a few days. We discussed the matter of the Company's proposition, and I laid before him some memoranda comparing this with the scheme already in hand. The advantage was all to the latter. It was easy to see, however, that Irving's mind was made up. The new scheme was attractive to him in his then condition and circumstances. He had been recently very, very ill and was still physically weak. He had for over two years felt the want of capital or of such organised

association of interests as makes for helpfulness; and here was something which would share, if it did not lift, the burden. At any rate, whatever may have been the cause or the prevailing argument or interest with him, he had in this matter made up his mind. When a man of his strong nature makes up his mind to a course of action he generally goes on with it despite reasons or arguments. So far as facts and deeds go he is like a horse that 445has taken the bit between its teeth. He listened, as ever, attentively and courteously and with seeming thoughtfulness, to all I had to say—and then shifted conversation to details, as though the main principle had been already accepted. On the 14th Comyns Carr came down on behalf of the Company as had been agreed before Irving sent for us. Together we all went over the scheme. As Irving had accepted the principle and was determined to go on, we could only discuss details. I tried hard to get a betterment of the sharing terms; but without avail. The only change of importance I could effect was that Irving should be put down for the same salary—almost nominal to an actor of his position—which had always been entered on our books. Even this was to be only the provincial salary, not the American which was three times as much. This concession, however, as to salary was eventually to him an addition of some five thousand pounds. A few lesser matters, such as the Company sharing the cost of storage, were to his betterment.

In the original proposition it had been, I believe, suggested that Irving should be a director of the Company, but when he told me of this I said such a decided “No” that he acquiesced. I impressed on him that he must not have his name in any form as a participant in the venture mentioned. He was selling to the Company and sharing his outside profits with them; and that such being the measure of his association, he should not be implicated beyond it.

According to our previous plan of policy I was already in treaty with Charles Frohman regarding the tour in America, to begin in the autumn of that year. There was to be no change in this arrangement, as after the London season with *Robespierre* was to come this tour. The correspondence with Frohman had now reached a point when it was absolutely necessary that one or other of us should cross the Atlantic. A multitude of details had to be discussed, and as this was our first business transaction with Frohman, all had to be gone over carefully so as to insure a full understanding of our mutual and individual interests and responsibilities. This could not possibly be done by cable, and there was no time for letters; already we were nearly a year later than was usual with such arrangements. As we had to settle things face to face, and as his own affairs would not allow of Frohman’s leaving America at that time, I had to go to New York. I left London on 31st January, 1899, and arrived at New York in the *Germanic* on 11th February—after coming through the greatest storm

in the North 446Atlantic ever recorded. I left New York in the *Teutonic* on 22nd February, and arrived in London on 1st March. During the time of my absence everything in which Irving was concerned had been completed. The contract between him and the Syndicate Company had been finally settled by the solicitors. The Syndicate Company had sold its rights to the Lyceum Theatre Company, which had been effectively floated and of which the whole capital had been subscribed. There was not anything left to me to do in the matter.

On my return I was surprised to hear that, in addition to the amount of capital originally mentioned in the provisional contract with Irving as that of the final Company to which his agreement was to be transferred on its flotation—namely, £170,000 in £100,000 6 per cent. preference and £70,000 ordinary shares—there appeared a sum of £120,000 mortgage debentures given to the original freeholders as a part of the purchase money. This made the responsibility of the Company up to £290,000.

Later on I learned that Irving's name had appeared in the prospectus as "Dramatic Adviser," a thing against which I had cautioned him. As a matter of fact he was never called by the directorate of the Company to fulfil the function. Once, he *offered* advice as to an engagement—which advice was happily taken to considerable advantage to the Company. But so far as I know he was never asked for his advice, nor were the Company's prospective arrangements ever made known to him in advance of the public intimation. I mention this here as it is, I think, advisable for his sake that it should be known.

With the one exception of Gillette's engagement, he never had knowledge of, or act or part in any of the business of the Lyceum Theatre Company outside those matters dependent on or arising from his own agreement with them.

As to myself: for right or wrong, when once I had communicated to him my views on the advisability of his contracting with the Company at all, I had no part in the matter and no responsibility.

After that illness of 1898 Irving's health was never the same as it had been before it. There was always a shortness of breath which, if it did not limit effort, made him careful how he exerted himself. It may have been partly this; it may have been partly the wound to a proud nature which was entailed by the long series of misfortunes with their consequent losses; but there was a certain 447shrinkage within himself during the last seven years of his life which was only too apparent to the eyes of those who loved him. To the outer world he still bore himself as ever: quiet, self-contained, masterful in his long purpose. Perhaps the little note of defiance which was added

was the conscious recognition of the blows of Fate. But outside his own immediate circle this was not to be seen; he was far too good an actor to betray himself. The bitterness was all for himself. He did not vent it on any one; he did not blame any one. He took it as a good fighter takes a hard blow: he fought all the more valiantly. When he was stricken with pleurisy and pneumonia he was in his sixty-first year. He had been working hard for forty-two years; strenuously for twenty-seven of them. Growing age more or less limits the resilient power; labour so exacting and so prolonged increases vastly the wear and tear of life. So we may, I think, take it that he was actually older than his years. Thus every little ailment told on him with undue force. Things that he used not to mind had now to be carefully considered. He had when working to give up many of his old pleasures so as to save himself for his work. Amongst these pleasures was that of sitting up late. Work had to be considered first, and last, and between; and whatever would take from his strength had to be rigorously put aside. Thus life lost part of its charm for him. He felt it deeply; and, all unknowing, was fostered that bitterness which had struck root already. It is the nature of strong men to fight harder through evil hours; and this was indeed a strong man. He would not give way on any point. Well he knew, with that deep, true instinct of his which is always the superior to mere logical thought, that to give way in anything however small is the beginning of the end.

His bearing through the last seven years was truly heroic. Now that it may be spoken of and known, I may say that I can recall in my own experience nothing like it. Each day, each hour, had its own tally of difficulty to be overcome—of pain or hardship to be borne—of some form of self-denial to be exercised. For a long time before this he had a complaint which always goes on increasing—a complaint common to actors and to all men and women who have to speak much; the complaint which is called "clergyman's sore throat." Doctors classify it as *Follicular Pharyngitis*. It is, as well as an irritating and often painful malady, a lowering condition from its constant loss of those secretions which make for perfect health. After his illness this seemed to grow to alarming proportions. 448Month by month and year by year the weakening expectoration increased, till for the last three years he used some *five hundred* pocket-handkerchiefs in each week. Such a detail is a somewhat sickening one even to read—what must it have been to the poor brave soul who through it all had to so bear himself as to conceal it from the world. He who lived with the fierce light of publicity on him had eternally to play his part day and night, bearing his old brave front so that none might know. Whoso is worthy to wear the crown must have the courage and the patience to endure. I ask no pity for him. He would have scorned even with his dying breath to ask for himself pity from any of the sons of men. But to

ask for pity and to deserve it are different things. It is my duty—my privilege now that in the perspective of history, recent though it be, I am writing the true inwardness of his life—to speak the exact truth so that those who loved him, even those who were content to accept him unquestioned, should learn how unfalteringly brave he was. It was not till February 1905 when after a hard night's work he fell fainting in the hall-way of the hotel at Wolverhampton that the true cause of his weakness was diagnosed. Fortunately he fell into the hands of one of the most able doctors in England, Dr. W. A. Lloyd-Davis of that town—a man to whom grateful thanks are due for his loving care of my dear friend. He it was who discovered that for more than six years—ever since his attack of pleurisy and pneumonia—Irving had been coughing up pus from an unhealed lung. I ask no pardon for giving these medical details. It was prudent to be silent all those years; but the time has gone for such reticence. It is well that the truth should be known.

Many and many a time; day or night; in stillness; in travel; in tropic heat such as now and again is experienced in early summer in America; through raging blizzards; in still cold when the thermometer registered down to figures below zero which would kill us in a breath did we have it in our moist atmosphere; in dust-storms of rapid travel; in the abounding dust of many theatres, the man had to toil unendingly. For others there was rest; for him none. For others there was cessation, or at worst now and again a lull in the storm of responsibility; for him none. Others could find occasional seclusion; for him there was no such thing. His very popularity was an added strain and trial to increasing weakness and ill-health. But in all, and through all, he never faltered or thought of faltering. For the well-meaning friend or 449stranger there was the same ever-ready hand of friendship, the same old winning smile of welcome. He might have later to pay for the added strain entailed by his very kindness of heart, but he went on his way all the same.

Henry Irving had undertaken to play the game of life; and he played it well. Right up to the very last hour of his life, when he was at work he *would not* think of himself. He would play as he had ever played: to the best of his power; in the fulness of his intention; with the last ounce of his strength.

If those who make it their business to direct the minds of youth knew what I know about him they would take this man—this great Englishman—as a shining light of endeavour; as a living embodiment of that fine principle, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might." All his life long Irving worked for others—for his art; never for himself. If rewards came—and they showered upon him—he took them meekly without undue pride, without arrogance; never as other than tributes beyond his worth. He made throughout years a great fortune, but nearly all of it he spent as it

came on his art, and in helping his poorer brethren. His own needs were small. He lived in a few rooms, ate sparingly, drank moderately. He had no vices that I know of; he was not extravagant; did not gamble, was not ostentatious even in his charities. There are many widows and orphans who mourn his loss; if only for his comforting sympathy and the helping of his kindly hand. In the sacred niche of many, many hearts there is a blank space which only a memory—no longer an image—fills.

Requiescat in pace!

V

In those last seven years of his life I was not able to see so much of him as I had been in the habit of doing throughout the previous twenty. We had each of us his own work to do, and the only way I could help him was to take on my own shoulders all the work I could. As he did not come to his office in the theatre regularly every day as he was accustomed to do, I used to go to him; to his flat in Stratton Street when in London, to his hotel when we travelled. He did not often have supper in the old way. He still entertained to a reasonable amount, but such entertainments were generally in the shape of dinners on Sunday, the only day possible 450to him. When the play was over at night he would dress slowly, having a chat as he did so; for he loved to talk over his work past, present and future. When travelling he would often be reluctant to take his way to his lonely home—if indeed a hotel can be called a home. When in London he would linger and linger; the loneliness of his home made it in a degree a prison house. But all that while, night by night and year by year, he would stick to his purpose of saving himself for his work—at any cost to himself in the shape of loss of pleasure, of any form of self-abnegation.

Thus it was that through those last seven years I saw less of his private life than I had hitherto done. My work became to save him all I could. Of course each day during working months, each night—except at holiday times—I would see him for hours; and our relations were always the same. But the opportunities were different. Seldom now were there the old long meetings when occasion was full of chances for self-development, for self-illumination; when idea leads on idea till presently the secret chambers of the soul are made manifest. Seldom did one gather the half-formed thoughts and purposes which tell so much of the inner working of the mind. It was, of course, in part that hopes and purposes belonged to an earlier age. There is more life and spring in intentions that have illimitable possibilities than in those that are manifestly bounded, if not cramped, by existing and adverse facts. But the effect was the same. The man, wearied by long toil and more or less deprived by age and health of the spurs of ambition, shrank somewhat into himself.

This book is no mere panegyric; it is not intended to be. For my own part, my love and admiration for Irving were such that nothing I could tell to others—nothing that I can recall to myself—could lessen his worth. I only wish that, so far as I can achieve it, others now and hereafter may see him with my eyes. For well I know that if they do, his memory shall not lack. He was a man with all a man's weaknesses and mutabilities as well as a man's strong qualities. Had he not had in his own nature all the qualities of natural man how could he have for close on half a century embodied such forces—general and distinctive—in such a long series of histrionic characters whose fidelity to natural type became famous. I have the feeling strong upon me that the more Irving's inner life is known, the better he must stand in the minds and hearts of all to whom his name, his work, and his fame are of interest.

451The year 1899 was so overwhelmingly busy a one for him that he had little time to think. But the next year, despite the extraordinary success which attended his work, he began to feel the loss of his own personal sway over the destinies of the Lyceum. There was in truth no need for worrying. The work of that year made for the time an extraordinary change in his fortunes. In the short season of fifteen weeks at the Lyceum the gross receipts exceeded twenty-eight thousand pounds. Five weeks' tour in the Provinces realised over eleven thousand pounds. And the tour in America of twenty-nine weeks reached the amazing total of over half a million dollars. To be exact $537,154.25. The exchange value in which all our American tour calculations were made was $4.84 per £1. So that the receipts become in British money £110,982 4*s*. 9*d*.—leaving a net profit of over thirty-two thousand pounds.

But the feeling of disappointment was not to be soothed by material success. Money, except as a means to an end, never appealed to Irving. We knew afterwards that the bitterness that then came upon him, and which lasted in lessening degree for some three years, was due in the main to his surely fading health. To him any form of lingering ill-health was a novelty. All his life up till then he had been amazingly strong. Not till after he was sixty did he know what it was to have toothache in ever so small a degree. I do not think that he ever knew at all what a headache was like. To such a man, and specially to one who has been in the habit of taxing himself to the full of his strength, restriction of effort from any cause brings a sense of inferiority. So far as I can estimate it, for he never hinted at it much less put it in words, Irving's tinge of bitterness was a sort of protest against Fate. Certainly he never visited it on any of those around him. Indeed, in any other man it would hardly have been noticeable; but Irving's nature was so sweet, and he was so really thoughtful for his fellow workers of all classes, that anything which clouded it was a concern to all.

As his health grew worse the bitterness began to pass away; and for the last two years of his life his nature, softened however to a new tenderness, went back to its old dignified calm.

VI

In the spring of 1905 came the beginning of the end. He had since his illness gone through the rigours of two American winters 452without seemingly ill effect. But now he began to lose strength. Still, despite all he would struggle on, and acted nightly with all his old unsparing energy and fire. The audiences saw little difference; he alone it was who suffered. Since the beginning of the new century his great ventures had not been successful. *Coriolanus* in 1901 and *Dante* in 1903 were costly and unsuccessful. Both plays were out of joint with the time. The public in London, the Provinces and America would not have them; though the latter play ran well for a few weeks before the public of London made up their minds that it was an inferior play. In both pieces Irving himself made personal success; it was the play in each case that was not popular. This was shown everywhere by the result of the change of bill; whenever any other play was put up the house was crowded. But a great organisation like Irving's requires perpetual sustenance at fairly high pressure. The five years of the new century saw a gradual oozing away of accumulation. The "production account" alone of that time exceeded twenty-five thousand pounds.

Had he been able to take a prolonged rest, say for a year, he might have completely recovered from the injury to his lung. But it is the penalty of public success that he who has achieved it must keep it. The slightest break is dangerous; to fall back or to lose one's place in the running is to be forgotten. He therefore made up his mind to accept the position of failing health and strength, and to set a time limit for his further efforts.

VII

The time for his retirement he fixed to be at the conclusion of his having been fifty years on the stage. He made the announcement at a supper given to him by the Manchester Art Club on June 1, 1904. This would give him two years in which to take farewell of the public. The time, though seeming at the first glance to be a generous one, was in reality none too long. There were only about forty working weeks in each year, eighty altogether. Of these the United States and Canada would absorb thirty. The Provinces would require three tours of some twelve weeks each. London would have fourteen or fifteen weeks in two divisions, during which would be given all the available plays in his *répertoire*.

At the conclusion of the tour we arranged with Mr. Charles 453Frohman, who secured for us the American dates for which we asked. We had made out the tour ourselves, choosing the best towns and taking them in such sequence that the railway travel should be minimised. All was ready, and on 19th September we began at Cardiff our series of farewell visits. The Welsh people are by nature affectionate and emotional. The last night at Cardiff was a touching farewell. This was repeated at Swansea with a strange addition: when the play was over and the calls finished the audience stood still in their places and seemingly with one impulse began to sing. They are all fine part-singers in those regions, and it was a strange and touching effect when the strains of Newman's beautiful hymn, "Lead, kindly light," filled the theatre. Then followed their own national song, "Land of my fathers."

Irving was much touched. He had come out before the curtain to listen when the singing began; and when, after the final cheering of the audience, he went back to his dressing-room the tears were still wet on his cheeks.

During that tour at half the places the visit was of farewell. For the tour had been arranged before Irving had made up his mind about retiring, and it was the intention that the last tour of all, before the final short season in London, should be amongst the eight greatest provincial cities.

VIII

In one of the towns then visited and where the visit was to be the final one, there was a very remarkable occasion. At Sunderland he had made his first appearance in 1856, and now the city wished to mark the circumstance of his last appearance in a worthy way. A public banquet was organised at which he was presented with an Address on behalf of the authorities and the townspeople. The function took place on the afternoon of Friday, October 28, 1904. The occasion was of special interest to Irving. For weeks beforehand his mind was full of it, for it brought back a host of old memories. He talked often with me of those old days, and every little detail seemed to come back vividly in that wonderful memory of his which could always answer to whatever call was made upon it. Amongst the little matters of those days when all things were of transcendent importance was one which had its full complement of chagrin and pain. In the preliminary bill regarding the New Lyceum Theatre, where the names of all the Company were given, 454his own name was wrongly spelled. It was given as "Mr. Irvine." At that time the name in reality did not matter much. It was not known in any way; it was not even his own by birthright, or as later by the Queen's Patent. But it was the name he hoped and intended to make famous; and the check at

the very start seemed a cruel blow. Of course the error was corrected, and on the opening night all was right.

In his early life he was very unfortunate regarding the proper spelling of his name. I find in the bill of his first appearance in Glasgow at the Dunlop Street Theatre his name thus given in the case of the great spectacular play, given on Easter Monday, April 9, 1869, *The Indian Revolt*:

“Achmet, a Hindoo attached to the Nana, by Mr. Irwig (his first appearance).”

I do not think that these two mistakes ever quite left his memory—certainly he was always very particular about his name being put in the bill exactly as he had arranged it.

The Sunderland function went off splendidly. Everything went so well that the whole affair was a delight to him and gave the city of his first appearance a new and sweet claim on his memory.

IX

Another provincial tour was arranged for the spring of 1905. It began at Portsmouth on the 23rd January and was to go on to 8th April, when it would conclude at Wigan. But severe and sudden illness checked it in the middle of the fifth week. The passage through the South and West had been very trying, for in addition to seven performances a week and many journeys there were certain public hospitalities to which he had been pledged. At Plymouth, lunch on Wednesday with the Admiral, Sir Edward Seymour; and on Thursday with the Mayor, Mr. Wyncotes and others, in the Plymouth Club. At Exeter, on Wednesday a Public Address and Reception in the Guildhall. Two days later at Bath a ceremony of unveiling a memorial to Quin the actor, followed by a civic lunch with the Mayor, Mr. John, in the Guildhall. On the following Tuesday, 21st February, a Public Address was to be presented in the Town Hall of Wolverhampton under the auspices of the Mayor, Mr. Berrington.

But by this time Irving had become so alarmingly ill that we were 455very seriously anxious. After the performance of *The Lyons Mail* at Boscombe on 3rd February he had been very ill and feeble, though he had so played that the audience were not aware of his state of health. The note in my diary for that day is:

“H. I. fearfully done up, could hardly play. At end in collapse. Could hardly move or breathe.”

His wonderful recuperative power, however, stood to him. Next day he played *The Merchant of Venice* in the morning and *Waterloo* and *The Bells* at night.

The function at Bath was very trying. The weather was bitterly cold, yet he stood bareheaded in the street speaking to a vast crowd. This required a great voice effort. It was a striking sight, for not only was the street packed solid with people, but every window was full and the high roofs were like clusters of bees. Our journey on the following Sunday was from Bath to Wolverhampton. Much snow had fallen and there was intense frost. So difficult was the railroading that our "special" was forty-five minutes late in a scheduled journey of three hours and ten minutes. In that journey Irving got a chill which began to tell at once on his strength. On Monday night he played *Waterloo* and *The Bells*. My note is:

"H. I. very weak, but got through all right."

But that night in going into the hotel he fainted—for the first time in his life! He did not know he had fainted until I told him the next morning. When the doctor saw him in the morning he said that he would not possibly be able to go to the Town Hall in the afternoon and play at night; that he was really fit for neither, but he might get through *one* of them. *Becket* was fixed for that night, and it was comparatively light work for him. That night he played all right, but at the end was done up, and short of breath. The next night he played *The Merchant of Venice*, and at the end of the play made his speech of farewell to Wolverhampton. But his condition of illness was such that we decided that the tour must be abandoned. Dr. Lloyd-Davies was with him in the theatre all the evening and did him yeoman's service. The next day Dr. Foxwell of Birmingham came over for consultation. After their examination the following bulletin was issued:

"It is imperatively necessary that Sir Henry Irving shall not act for at least two months from this date.

"Arthur Foxwell, M.D.

"W. Allan Lloyd-Davies, L.R.C.P., F.R.C.S."

456On 17th March I visited Irving at Wolverhampton. He was looking infinitely better and we had a drive before luncheon. The two doctors had another consultation and it was decided that Irving must not go to America, as arranged for the following autumn. Loveday came down by a later train, and he and Irving and I consulted as to future arrangements. We returned to London next day and a few days later Irving left Wolverhampton for Torquay, where he remained till 19th April.

In the meantime I had seen Charles Frohman and postponed our American tour for a year.

X

A short season of six weeks had been arranged for Drury Lane. This began on 29th April. There were three weeks of *Becket* and two of *The Merchant of Venice*. In the last week were four nights of *Waterloo* and *Becket*, the last performance of this bill being the last night of the season, and two nights of *Louis XI.* All went well for the six weeks. He was none the worse for the effort.

The last night of the season, June 10, 1905, was one never to be forgotten by any one who was present. It almost seemed as if the public had some precognition that it was the last time they would see Irving play. The house was crowded in every part—an enormous audience, the biggest Irving ever played to in London—and full of wild enthusiasm. An inspiring audience! Irving felt it and played magnificently; he never played better in his life. The moment of his entrance was the signal for a roar of welcome, prolonged to an extraordinary degree. Something of the same kind marked the close of each act. At the end the audience simply went mad. It was a scene to be present at once in a lifetime. The calls were innumerable. Time after time the curtain had to be raised to ever the same wild roar. It was marvellous how the strength of the audience held out so long.

It had been arranged that on that night at the close of the play the presentation of a Loving Cup by the workmen of all the theatres throughout the kingdom should take place on the stage. The representatives of the various theatres assembled in due course, about a hundred of them. As there were to be some speeches, a moment of quiet was necessary; we tried turning down the lights in the theatre, for still the audience kept cheering. It never ceased—that prolonged insistent note of perpetual renewals which once heard has a place in memory. After a while we did a thing I never saw done before: the lights were turned quite out. But still the audience remained cheering through the black darkness of the house.

HENRY IRVING AND JOHN HARE

The last photograph of Henry Irving taken in John Hare’s garden at Overstrand by Miss Hare, 1905

457Irving with his usual discernment and courtesy recognised the right thing to do. He ordered the curtain to go up once more; and stepping in front of the stage said, so soon as the wild roar of renewed strength, stilled on purpose, would allow him:

“Ladies and gentlemen,—We have a little ceremony of our own to take place on the stage to-night. I think, however, it will be the mind of all my friends on the stage that you should join in our little ceremony. So with your permission we will go on with it.”

Another short sharp cheer and then sudden stillness.

The presentation was made in due form and then—the curtain still remaining up, for there was to be no more formal barrier that night—the audience, cheering all the time, melted away.

It was a worthy finish to a lifetime of loving appreciation of the art work of a great man.

This was Irving's last regular London performance, and with the exception of his playing *Waterloo* for the benefit of his old friend, Lionel Brough, at His Majesty's Theatre on 15th June, the last time he ever appeared in London.

XI

The autumn tour of that year, 1905, was fixed for ten weeks and a half, to commence at Sheffield on 2nd October. The tour commenced very well. There were fine houses despite the fact that it was the week of the Musical Festival. On Tuesday, 3rd, the Lord Mayor, Sir Joseph Jonas, gave a great luncheon for him in the Town Hall. Irving was in good form and spoke well. There was nothing noticeable in his playing or regarding his health all that week. On Saturday night there was a big house and much enthusiasm. Irving seemed much touched as he said farewell. From Sheffield we went on to Bradford.

The Monday and Tuesday night at Bradford went all right. Irving did not seem ill or extremely weak. We had by now been accustomed to certain physical feebleness—except when he was on the stage. On Wednesday the Mayor, Mr. Priestley, was giving a big lunch for him in the Town Hall, at which he was to be presented 458with a Public Address. I joined him at his hotel at a little past one o'clock and we went together to the Town Hall. He seemed very feeble that morning, and as we went slowly up the steep steps he paused several times to get his breath. He had become an adept at concealing his physical weakness on such occasions. He would seize on some point of local or passing interest and make inquiries about it, so that by the time the answer came he would have been rested. There was a party of some fifty gentlemen, all friends, all hearty, all delightful. On the presentation of the Address he spoke well, but looked sadly feeble.

That night we played *Louis XI.* He got through his work all right, but was very exhausted after it. The bill of the next night was the one we dreaded, *The Bells*. I had been with him at his hotel for an hour in the morning and we had got through our usual work together. He seemed feeble, but made no complaint. There was a great house that night. When Irving arrived he seemed exceedingly feeble though not ill. In his dressing-room I noticed that he did that which I had never known him do before: sit down in a listless way and delay beginning to dress for his part. He seemed tired, tired; tired not for an hour but for a lifetime. He played, however, just as usual. There was no perceptible diminution of his strength—of his fire. But when the play was over he was absolutely exhausted. Whilst he was dressing I went in and sat with him, having previously given instructions to the Master Machinist to send *The Bells* back to London. When I told Irving what I had done he acquiesced in it and seemed relieved.

He had played *The Bells* against the strong remonstrances of Loveday and myself. Knowing him as I did, I came to the conclusion that his doing so was to prove himself. He had felt weak but would not yield to the suspicion; he wanted to *know*.

It may be wondered at or even asked why Henry Irving was allowed to play at all, being in his then state of weakness.

In the first place, Irving was his own master, and took his own course entirely. He was of a very masterful nature and took on his own shoulders the full responsibility of his acts. He would listen to the advice of those whom he trusted naturally, or had learned to trust; but he was, within the limits of possibility, the final arbiter of matters concerning himself in which there was any power of choice. The forces of a strong nature have to be accepted *en bloc*; these very indomitable forces of resolution and persistence—of the disregard of pain or weariness to himself which had given him his 459great position—ruled him in weakness as in strength. His will was the controlling power of his later as of his earlier days.

Moreover, he *could not* stop. To do so would have been final extinction. His affairs were such that it was necessary to go on for the sake of himself in such span of life as might be left to him, and for the sake of others. The carrying out of his purpose of going through his farewell tours would mean the realisation of a fortune; without such he would begin the unproductive period of age in poverty. Accustomed as he had been now for many years to carry out his wishes in his own way: to do whatever he had set his heart on and to help his many friends and comrades, to be powerless in such matters would have been to him a never-ending pain of chagrin. All this, of course over and above the ties and duties of his family and his own personal needs. He was a very proud man, and the inevitable blows to his pride would have been to him worse than death—especially when such might be obviated by labour, howsoever arduous or dangerous the same might be. We who knew him well recognised all this. All that we could do was to keep our own counsel, and to help him to the best of our respective powers.

XII

The next morning, 13th October, I went to Irving at half-past twelve. Loveday as had been arranged came at one o’clock. We three discussed matters ahead of us fully. We decided on the changes to be made in the bill for the following week when we were to play in Birmingham. Irving seemed quite calm, and, under the circumstances, cheerful. He endorsed the decision of the previous evening as to leaving *The Bells* out of the *répertoire* for the remainder of the tour; he seemed pleased at not having to play

the piece for the present. We then decided on such other arrangements as were consequently necessary. During our conversation Irving said:

“Of course the American tour is absolutely impossible! It will have to be abandoned! But time enough for that; we can see to it later.”

That morning he was undoubtedly feeble. He was so unusually amenable in accepting the changes of his plans that when we were walking back I commented on it to Loveday, saying:

“He acquiesced too easily; I never knew him so meek before. I don’t like it!”

460When he came down to the theatre that night Irving seemed much better and stronger, and was more cheerful than he had been for some time. He played well; and though he was somewhat exhausted, was infinitely less so than he had been on the previous evening. There was no speech that night, so that the last words he spoke on the stage were Becket’s last words in the play:

“Into Thy hands, O Lord! into Thy hands!”

I sat in his room with him while he dressed. He was quite cheerful, and we chatted freely. I thought that he had turned the corner and was already, with that marvellous recuperative power of his, on the way to get strong again. I told him that it was my opinion that now he was rid of the apprehension of having to play *The Bells* he would be himself soon:

“You have been feeling the taking up of your work again after an absence from it of four months, the longest time of rest in your life. Now you have got into your stride again, and work will be easy!”

He thought for a moment and then said quietly:

“I really think that is so!” Then he seemed to get quite cheery.

Percy Burton, who arranged our advance matters, had in answer to my telegram come over from Birmingham, so that he might be fully told of our prospective changes. He was coming home to supper with me before he got the train back to Birmingham. I had asked Irving if he wanted to see him; but he said he did not, as Burton quite knew what to do. Then, always thoughtful of others, he added:

“But if he is going by the one o’clock train you must not wait here. He will want time to take his supper.” I stood up to go and he held out his hand to say good-night. Afterwards, the remembrance of that affectionate movement came back to me with

gratitude, for it was not usual; when men meet every day and every night, hand-shaking is not a part of the routine of friendly life. As I went out he said to me:

“Muffle up your throat, old chap. It is bitterly cold to-night and you have a cold. Take care of yourself! Good-night! God bless you!”

Those were the last words that I heard Henry Irving speak!

Burton and I were at supper when a carriage drove rapidly up to the door of my lodging. I suspected that it was something for 461me and opened the door myself at once. Mr. Sheppard, one of my assistants who always attended to Irving’s private matters, stepped in, saying quickly:

“I think you had better come down to the Midland Hotel at once. Sir Henry is ill. He fainted in the hall just as he did at Wolverhampton. When the doctor came I rushed off for you!” We all jumped into the carriage and hurried as fast as we could go to the hotel.

In the hall were some twenty men grouped round Irving who lay at full length on the floor. One of the doctors, there were three of them there then, told me quietly that he was dead. He had died just two minutes before. The clock in the hall showed the time then as eight minutes to twelve. So that he died at ten minutes to twelve.

It was almost impossible to believe, as he lay there with his eyes open, that he was really dead. I knelt down by him and felt his heart to know for myself if it was indeed death. But all was sadly still. His body was quite warm. Walter Collinson, his faithful valet, was sitting on the floor beside him, crying. He said to me through his sobs:

“He died in my arms!”

His face looked very thin and the features sharp as he lay there with his chest high and his head fallen back; but there was none of the usual ungracefulness of death. The long iron-grey hair had fallen back, showing the great height of his rounded forehead. The bridge of his nose stood out sharp and high. I closed his eyes myself; but as I had no experience in such a matter I asked one of the doctors, who kindly with deft fingers straightened the eyelids. Then we carried him upstairs to his room and laid him on his bed.

I had to send a host of telegrams at once to inform the various members of his family and the press. The latter had to go with what speed we could, for the hour of his death was such that there was no local information. Loveday arrived at the hotel after we had carried him to his room. He was indeed greatly distressed and in bitter sorrow.

The actual cause of Irving's death was physical weakness; he lost a breath, and had not strength to recover it.

Sheppard told me that when Irving was leaving the theatre he had said to him that he had better come to the hotel with him, as was sometimes his duty. When he got into the carriage he had sat with his back to the horses—this being his usual custom by 462which he avoided a draught. He was quite silent during the short journey. When he got out of the carriage he seemed very feeble, and as he passed through the outer hall of the hotel seemed uncertain of step. He stumbled slightly and Sheppard held him up. Then when he got as far as the inner hall he sat down on a bench for an instant.

That instant was the fatal one. In the previous February at Wolverhampton, when he had suffered from a similar attack of weakness, he had fallen down flat. In that attitude Nature asserted herself, and the lungs being in their easiest position allowed him to breathe mechanically. Now the seated attitude did not give the opportunity for automatic effort. The syncope grew worse; he slipped on the ground. But it was then too late. By the time the doctor arrived, after only a few minutes in all, he had passed too far into the World of Shadows to be drawn back by any effort of man or science. The heart beat faintly, and more faintly still. And then came the end.

Before I left the hotel in the grey of the morning I went into the bedroom. It wrung my heart to see my dear old friend lie there so cold and white and still. It was all so desolate and lonely, as so much of his life had been. So lonely that in the midst of my own sorrow I could not but rejoice at one thing: for him there was now Peace and Rest.

I was at the hotel again at 7.30, and then went to meet his eldest son, H. B. Irving, at the Great Northern Station at 9.35. He had received my telegram in time to start by the newspaper train. His other son, Laurence, with his wife, arrived later in the day; my telegram to him had not arrived in time to allow his coming till the morning train. The undertaker had come in the morning at nine, and the embalming done before Irving's sons had arrived.

That afternoon all the Company, including the workmen, came to see him. It was a very touching and harrowing time for all, for he was much beloved by every one.

At seven o'clock in the evening the body was laid in the lead coffin. I was present alone with the undertakers and saw the lead coffin sealed. This was then placed in the great oak coffin—which an hour later was taken privately through the yard of the Midland Hotel by a devious way to the Great Northern Station so as to avoid publicity; for the streets were thronged with waiting crowds. 463At Bradford, Saturday is a half-

day, and large numbers of people are abroad. The ex-mayor, Mr. Lupton, who had entertained Irving in the Town Hall at his previous visit, kindly arranged with the Chief Constable that all should be in order in the streets. All day throughout the City the flags had been at half-mast, and there was everywhere a remarkable silence through which came the mournful sound of the minute-bells from seemingly all the churches.

At half-past nine we left the hotel to drive to the railway station. The appearance of the streets and the demeanour of the crowd I shall never forget; and I never want to. Everywhere was a sea of faces, all the more marked as all hats were off as we drove slowly along. Street after street of silent humanity; and in all that crowd nothing but grief and respect. One hardly realised its completeness till when, now and then, a sob broke the stillness. To say that it was moving would convey but a poor idea of that attitude of the crowd; it was poignant—harrowing—overwhelming. In silence the crowd stood back; in silence, without hurry or pushing or stress of any kind, closed around us and followed on. It was the same at the railway station; everywhere the silent crowd, holding back respectfully, uncovered.

For a quarter of a century I had been accustomed when travelling with Irving to see the rushing crowd closing in with cheers and waving of hats and kerchiefs; to watch the moving sea of hands thrust forward for him to shake, to hear the roar of the cheering crowd kept up till the train began to move, and then to hear it dying away from our ears not from cessation but from mere distance. And now this silence! No nobler or more loving tribute than the silence of that mighty crowd could ever be paid to the memory of one who has passed away. Were I a Yorkshireman I should have been proud of Bradford on that day. It moves me strangely to think of it yet.

XIII

The Dean and Chapter of Westminster Abbey were memorialised by a number of persons of importance to have a Public Funeral with burial in the Abbey. So important were the signatories that no difficulty was experienced. The only condition made was that the body should be cremated, as a rule had been established that henceforth no actual body should be buried in the Abbey. The ground had in the past been so broken that for new graves it would be 464necessary to go down into the concrete, which might injure the structure. The Abbey authorities were most kind in all ways. Dean Armitage Robinson gave from his sick-bed his approval, and Sub-Dean Duckworth and Archdeacon Wilberforce made all arrangements. Indeed the Dean on the day of the funeral got up in order to perform the burial service.

The Baroness and Mr. Burdett-Coutts, knowing that Irving’s flat in 17 Stratton Street was not suited to receive the crowds who would wish to pay their respects, kindly

placed at the disposal of his family their spacious house in Piccadilly and Stratton Street. Here on Thursday, the 19th, he lay in state. The great dining-room was made a *Chapelle ardente*, and here were placed the many, many flowers that were sent. There was a veritable sea of them—wreaths, crosses, symbolic forms of all kinds. On the coffin over the heart lay the floral cross sent by the Queen. Attached to it was a broad ribbon on which she had written as her tribute to the dead the last words he had spoken on the stage:

"Into Thy hands, O Lord! into Thy hands!"

On a little table in front of the coffin lay the wreath sent by Ellen Terry. Behind, hung high along the end wall of the lofty room, was the pall—"sent anonymously," as the card on it declared. Surely such a pall was never before seen. It was entirely wrought of leaves of fresh laurel. Thousands upon thousands of them went to its making up. It was so large that at the funeral when fourteen pall-bearers marched with the coffin it covered all the space and hung to the ground, before, behind, and on either side.

Through that room all day long passed a silent and mournful crowd of all classes and degrees; and at any moment of the time a single glance at their faces would have shown what love and sorrow had brought them there.

XIV

a

The Public Funeral took place on Friday, 20th October. It would be impossible in a book of this size to give details of it, even if such belonged to the scope of my work. Suffice it that all the honours which can be paid to the illustrious dead were observed. The King had sent to represent him, according to the custom of such ceremonies, Irving's old and dear friend, General the Right 465Hon. Sir Dighton Probyn, V.C. The Queen's formal representative was Earl Howe; but her personal tribute was the beautiful cross of flowers which lay on the actor's coffin. The Prince and Princess of Wales were also represented. Others were there also whom men call "great"—chiefs of all great endeavours. Ministers and soldiers, ambassadors and judges, peers and great merchants, and many sorrowing exponents of all the Arts. To name them would be impossible; to try to describe the ceremony unavailing. But the place for all this is not here; it belongs now to the history of the Age and Nation.

b

All the previous night the coffin had lain in the little chapel of St. Faith between the South Transept—wherein is the Poet's Corner where Irving was to be laid—and the

Chapter House, where the mourners were to assemble. The funeral had been arranged for noon, but hours before that time every approach to the Abbey was thronged with silent crowds. There was a hush in the air through which the roar of the traffic in the streets seemed to come modified, as though it had been intercepted by that belt of silence. Slowly, imperceptibly, like shadows in their silence, the crowds gathered; a sombre mass closing as if with a black ring the whole precincts of the Cathedral.

Noon found the interior of the edifice a solid mass of people, save where the passage-way up the Nave and Choir was marked with masses of white flowers. Wreaths and crosses and bunches of flowers must have been sent in hundreds—thousands, for in addition to those within, both sides of the Cloister walks were banked with them.

Who could adequately describe that passing from the Chapter House, whence the funeral procession took its way through the South and West Cloister Walk, down the South Aisle and up the Nave and Choir till the coffin was rested before the Sanctuary; the touching music, in which now and again the sweet childish treble—the purest sound on earth—seemed to rend the mourners' very hearts; the mighty crowd, silent, with bowed heads; everywhere white faces with eyes that wept.

Oh that crowd! Never in the world was greater tribute to any man. The silence! The majestic silence, for it transcended negation and became positive from its dormant force. "Not dead silence, but living silence!" as the dead man's old companion, Sir 466Edward Russell, said in words that should become immortal. All thoughts of self were forgotten; the lesser feelings of life seemed to have passed away in that glory of triumphant sorrow. Eye and heart and brain and memory went with the Dead as to the solemn music the mournful procession passed along. Surely a lifetime of devotion must have gone to the crowning of those long-drawn seconds. To one moving through that divine alley-way of sympathetic sorrow it seemed as though the serried ranks on either hand, seen in the dimness of that October day, went back and back to the very bounds of the thinking world.

As from the steps of the Sanctuary came the first words of the Service for the Burial of the Dead, a bright gleam of winter sunshine burst through the storied window of the South Transept and lit up the laurel pall till it glistened like gold.

And then for a little while few could see anything except dimly through their tears.

When the last words of the Benediction had been spoken over his grave, there came from the Organ-loft the first solemn notes of Handel's noble *Dead March*. The great organ had been supplemented by military instruments, and as the mournful notes of

the trumpets rose they seemed to cling to the arches and dim corners of the great Cathedral, tearing open our hearts with endless echoes. And then the solemn booming of the muffled drums seemed to recall us to the life that has to be lived on, howsoever lonely or desolate it may be.

“The song of woe

Is after all an earthly song.”

The trumpets summon us, and the drums beat the time of the onward march—quick or slow as Duty calls.

March! March!

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Printed by Ballantyne & Co. Limited

Tavistock Street, London

TRANSCRIBER’S NOTES

1. P. 408, changed “Are we all to burned” to “Are we all to be burned”.
2. Silently corrected obvious typographical errors and variations in spelling.
3. Retained archaic, non-standard, and uncertain spellings as printed.
4. Re-indexed footnotes using numbers.